



STAFF REPORT

DATE: JANUARY 23, 2012
TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS
MEMBERS OF THE RECREATION & PARKS COMMISSION
FROM: ROD FOSTER, CITY MANAGER
PREPARED BY: BILL SMITH, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
SUBJECT: COLTON SPORTS COMPLEX/REGIONAL PARK

RECOMMENDED ACTION

It is recommended that the City Council, with the support of the Recreation & Parks Commission, provide direction to staff regarding the development of a Sports Complex.

GOAL STATEMENT

The proposed action will support the City's goal to continue to work toward establishing a new sports complex to meet the growing needs of Colton's sports community.

BACKGROUND

About 2002, the City began work with San Bernardino County Regional Parks and the Wildlands Conservancy to bring a Regional Park to the City of Colton. During the course of this effort, which concluded in 2008, the primary site for this park was located on about 110 acres west and north of the Santa Ana River, south of Congress Street, and east of the Southern Pacific railroad line. The Colton Regional Park was to have been a jointly-administered facility, with the City of Colton overseeing a soccer/football sports complex portion of the park, and County Regional Parks assuming responsibility for the remainder of the facility.

Since the agreement between City and County in 2008 that this project was no longer viable, the Recreation & Parks Commission has made the development of a City soccer/football complex its top priority for park development in Colton. Specifically, the Commission has adopted that such a complex should include not less than five (5) soccer/football fields, to accommodate the needs of Colton's youth sports population. Currently, the City of Colton does not own any designated soccer or football fields in any of its parks. All current demand for soccer and football in Colton, which exceeds 1,000 youth participants, is met through the use of Colton Joint Unified School District facilities. These fields have been reported as extremely crowded, and during peak times of use, field conditions are less-than-optimal, due to volume of use.

On May 21, 2008, the Recreation & Parks Commission voted 4-0, making the following recommendations to the City Council.

- 1) That the need for a sports complex is evident
- 2) That the Warm Creek Basin area of the City is the preferred location for the project
- 3) That the project should prioritize sports fields that support soccer and football

On August 20, 2008, a conceptual plan was presented to the Commission, for a soccer/football sports complex on the Warm Creek basin property in Colton. This plan consisted of seven (7) soccer/football fields, and was approved by the Commission as a rough site plan. Subsequently, City staff and elected officials met with County Supervisor Josie Gonzales and her staff, to explore the feasibility of this project, as the Warm Creek basin property in Colton is owned by the County of San Bernardino. After multiple discussions regarding this location, it was determined that the Warm Creek basin was not a viable option for this project.

The City of Riverside Public Utilities Department has begun planning a water recharge project on parcels which it owns, located on the former Regional Park site in South Colton. During planning meetings in 2009 and 2010, which were attended by Colton staff, parties indicated a desire to develop this project in such a way that passive recreational amenities, such as walking trails and interactive nature areas, might be incorporated into the project. Riverside Public Utilities expressed a willingness to do so, and at this time, the project is being developed to include such recreational features.

Removing the approximately 42 acres of Riverside-owned land, which is designated for the aforementioned recharge project, from the original 110 acres planned for the Regional Park, this leaves approximately 60-70 acres, which still might provide an opportunity for a park site, and specifically for the much-needed sports complex. As such, staff has begun to look into the possibility of locating such a project on this remaining acreage.

On December 13, 2011, Mayor Zamora, City Manager Foster, and Community Services Director Smith met with State Senators Gloria Negrete-McLeod and Lou Correa, to discuss potential funding sources for a Regional Park. Senator Correa's district includes the City of Santa Ana, which has multiple projects along the Santa Ana River awaiting funding. Both Senators seemed willing to work together to try and find ways to bring funding to projects located along the River, and they indicated that they would direct their respective staffs to explore options, including legislative action, to facilitate this goal.

Subsequently to this meeting, staff has contacted the offices of both Senators Negrete-McLeod and Correa. Staff at Senator Negrete-McLeod's office has provided City staff with a list of grant opportunities that might be applicable to efforts to build a park at this location. At the time of this report, neither Senator's office has provided any further information on potential legislative action which might benefit this project, as anticipated by staff following the December 13 meeting.

ISSUES/ANALYSIS

Staff considers a definitive location for this project to be the essential first step toward making the project a reality. The reason for this opinion is that most, if not all potential funding sources for the project, are contingent upon demonstration of “site control” by the agency. In other words, most funding sources will not award funding to a project which does not have a designated location, with property rights under the control of the requesting agency.

The City of Colton currently owns approximately 18 of the 60-70 acres in question at this location. It should be noted that about 3-6 acres of this land is designated as Woolly Star habitat, and any plan to develop this project will need to incorporate this conservation. Another approximately 25 acres are owned by other public entities, with the remaining 20+ acres privately-owned. Since most of this acreage was tentatively committed to the original Regional Park project, staff believes it is reasonable to assume that the planning of a similar, subsequent project might be a viable undertaking. Additionally, 60-70 acres is more-than-sufficient to provide a sports complex which meets the minimum specifications as designated by the Recreation & Parks Commission. In fact, a site of this size would likely provide the ability to incorporate additional park elements, as desired and determined during the design process.

From a park-planning standpoint, the location seems suitable to accommodate such a project. This opinion is based on initial studies conducted during the initial planning for the original Regional Park concept. Additionally, with the Riverside recharge project to be located adjacent to this location, this might provide opportunities for a nice transition from the passive recreational amenities planned for the recharge project, to more active amenities to be incorporated into a sports complex. This plan would also allow for effective incorporation of interactive nature areas, including the aforementioned Woolly Star habitat. Given also that this location abuts the Santa Ana River to the south, it might be possible to connect such a project to the Santa Ana River Trail, which is located immediately to the south of the River. It should be noted that the original Regional Park concept plan also called for this connectivity.

The only apparent downside to this location, from a purely “park master planning” perspective, is its proximity to the City’s largest current community park, Veteran’s Park. Siting this project at this location will further concentrate the City’s park resources in designated locations, rather than spreading them out geographically, which is optimal park planning strategy. This aspect notwithstanding, staff still feels as though this site likely represents the most realistic current opportunity to bring a sports complex/regional park to the City of Colton, in the shortest amount of time.

FISCAL IMPACTS

Fiscal impacts are difficult to predict at this time. The concept plan developed for the Warm Creek basin property in 2008 estimated project construction costs at \$18-\$23 million. This does not take into account any planning and/or land acquisition costs associated with the project.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Direct staff to begin to explore acquisition of property rights for the former Regional Park property.
2. Provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS

Final rendering of former Regional Park site plan

